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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

TUESDAY, JUNE 6, 1939.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

SUBJECT: "BIRD QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS." Information from the Bureau of Biological Survey, United States Department of Agriculture.

--ooOoo--

Another question and answer day has rolled around. But instead of the usual inquiries about cooking and household matters, the questions today are about birds. People have always been interested in birds. Birds are mentioned in the Bible and even in older books. But today people have a practical interest in birds. Farmers and gardeners are interested in attracting and encouraging birds because birds destroy insect pests. Scientists of the Biological Survey have showed how tremendously valuable this work of the birds is. Biological Survey studies give us the picture of our native birds as a great army of free workers that spend every summer hour from dawn to dark helping destroy the insects that ruin crops and gardens.

But let's get back to the questions..... The first comes from a gardener who has had a great deal of trouble with wireworms. She writes: "Please tell me which birds eat wireworms. If possible I should like to encourage the birds that help keep down these destructive pests."

Answer: You have more than 125 bird allies in your fight against wireworms. And a good fight it is since these hungry insects, which are the larvae of click beetles, damage pastures, corn and all other grains as well as many garden crops. The most efficient destroyers of wireworms or their parent beetle are: the downy and red-bellied woodpeckers, nighthawk, kingbird, greatcrested flycatcher, crow, blue jay, grackle, red-winged blackbird, lark sparrow, tree swallow, purple martin, house wren, and robin. The biologists have found as many as 40 wireworms in the

stomach of a robin. That's just a sample of how many worms a bird can destroy at one meal.

Another gardener inquires about birds with an appetite for the cutworm which has been giving trouble in her garden.

Answer: The biologists have found the birds that eat the most cutworms or their adult forms, certain moths, to be: the bob white, prairie chicken, wood duck, woodcock, sparrow hawk, yellow-billed cuckoo, nighthawk, red-headed woodpecker, grackle, meadow lark, cardinal, and robin.

Now here's a question about that tiny fidgety bird, so often seen around barns and gardens and old orchards--the house wren. A homemaker writes: "In the early spring we put up several wren houses in nearby trees and now have several flourishing wren families as tenants. My children are interested to know whether wrens are useful as well as amusing neighbors."

Answer: House wrens are very useful birds because their favorite menu is: bugs, grasshoppers, caterpillars, and beetles. Wrens are fond of leaf beetles, some of the worst insect pests. They also have a decided taste for fuzzy caterpillars and moths. Because the wren has a good-sized family, averages 6 to a brood, and has 2 or 3 families a season, it uses up a good many insects in rearing them.

However, wrens have one bad fault. They interfere to some extent with the nesting of other birds, even go as far as to puncture and destroy their eggs. So where you notice trouble between the wrens and other birds that also are helpful and interesting, it may be well to take down some of the wren houses.

The old trouble between cats and birds comes up again in a question this week. "Please tell me", writes another homemaker--"Please tell me whether there is any way to keep a prowling cat from making off with the young birds in our bird houses."

Answer! If you love birds and your neighbors have cats, you are in a difficult situation. For even the presence of a cat upsets nesting birds and may even drive them away from your locality. Young birds just out of the nest are the easiest of prey for a cat and tempt even the cat not ordinarily a bird killer. But you can at least make your bird houses safe for the birds while they are in the nest.

One way to make a bird house safe is to set it up high on an iron pipe. Cats can't climb iron pipes. Then on trees or posts you can put up metal guards that cats can't climb over. Cut a piece of sheet metal about 18 inches long and wide enough to stretch around the tree. Tack it closely to the trunk. Or tack the top but spread the bottom out like a cone. A cat can't get its claws into this metal so can't climb above it. But be sure to place the shield so high on the post or tree (about 6 feet) that the cat can't spring from the ground and get hold above it.

Many times a far-overhanging or sloping roof over the nest opening is a partial protection against cats. If you live in town and can fence in your property, you can use fencing that will keep cats out. A fence of poultry wire that is 6 feet high and has an outward overhang of 2 feet at the top is proof against the most eager cat.

If you are interested in providing birds with the right kind of homes, you are welcome to Farmers' Bulletin No. 1456 called "Homes for Birds." As long as the supply lasts, you can have a copy of "Homes for Birds" simply by writing to the Department of Agriculture in Washington, D. C. and asking for it.

